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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: CODEL ENGEL WELCOMES NEW CONSTITUTION

11. (SBU) Summary: Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY) led a a delegation to Kosovo June 13-16 to mark the entry into force of Kosovo's new constitution on June 15. Accompanying him on the trip was Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-OH), who visited Kosovo for the first time, and a prominent group of Kosovar-American businesspersons. The CODEL met with President Sejdiu, PM Thaci, FM Hyseni as well as leaders of all political parties. This trip also marked the first time Rep. Engel met officially with Kosovo Serb political leaders. The CODEL's overarching message was one of support and friendship for Kosovo from the United States. Throughout the trip and in all his meetings, the CODEL stressed the importance of working across political lines to keep Kosovo stable and calm during the current transition period, and the need for Kosovo to be inclusive of and responsive to its minority communities. All interlocutors agreed with these principles, although opposition politicians viewed June 15 as a reason to be more critical of the ruling coalition. The capstone to the CODEL's visit was Rep. Engel's emotional and heartfelt address to the Kosovo Assembly -- the first by a foreign dignitary since independence and an event very warmly received by Kosovo leaders from across the political spectrum. Throughout the visit, press was out in force and reported on Rep. Engel's history as a champion of Kosovo freedom and independence. End Summary.

12. (U) Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), accompanied by Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-OH) and a prominent group of Kosovar-American businesspersons, paid a June 13-16 visit to Kosovo and were on hand to welcome the entry into force of Kosovo's new constitution (reftel). During his visit, Engel spent a day in western Kosovo visiting Peja/Pec, where a street was named in his honor in 2005, the family home of AAK party leader Ramush Haradinaj in Gllojan (near Decan), and StoneCastle Vineyards, a privatization success story of a Kosovar-American businessman, located in the wine-growing region of Rahovec.

Meetings with Government

13. (SBU) The CODEL met jointly with President Fatmir Sejdiu and FM Skender Hyseni and stressed the need to be proactive in requesting recognition of Kosovo from other states. Engel offered his own services, commenting that as Chairman of the

House subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, he meets regularly with high ranking officials from that region. Engel also encouraged Sejdiu to send an ambassador to Washington "as soon as possible." After a brief visit to Camp Bondsteel to greet U.S. troops, the CODEL was welcomed by PM Thaci at his family home outside of Skenderaj, in the village of Buroj. In addition to raising the issue of further recognition for Kosovo and the need for leaders to be more active, Rep. Schmidt raised the problem of energy shortfalls, asking PM Thaci and Assembly President Krasniqi, in separate meetings, to focus their policies on long-term solutions.

The Opposition

¶4. (SBU) CODEL Engel met with all the opposition party leaders, including Agim Ceku (PDSK), Nexhat Daci (LDD), Bexhet Pacolli (AKR), Ramush Haradinaj (AAK), and Teuta Sahatquija (ORA). The overall tone of this group was very critical of the ruling PDK/LDK coalition and they gave Engel a message that now that the constitution was in effect, they would be even more vocal in their criticism of the shortcomings of the government, including in the areas of healthcare, education, the economy and energy. As he had in all his previous meetings, Rep. Engel underscored to this group the need to cooperate, even with political rivals, on issues of mutual importance, and said that there are many issues in Kosovo, including recognition, that transcend party politics. He pointed to his colleague Rep. Schmidt as an example of how both sides of the U.S. Congress can collaborate on issues of importance, such as support for

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Kosovo.

Kosovo Serbs in the Assembly

¶5. (SBU) By his own account, this visit marked the first time that Rep. Engel, who has visited Kosovo numerous times over the last 20 years, met officially with Kosovo Serbs. The scheduled half hour meeting with the SLS caucus, led by Bojan Stojanovic, ran nearly an hour and would have continued if there had been more time. In a comment to Poloff, Engel said he went into the meeting not really knowing what to expect, but certainly not expecting to come away from the meeting so positively impressed by the courage of that small group of lawmakers, dedicated to working within Kosovo institutions. He indicated he would want to meet again with this group on future visits to Kosovo.

Engel Addresses the Assembly

¶6. (SBU) After meeting with the Assembly President Krasniqi, where discussion touched on the challenges facing Kosovo's development and the important role lawmakers play to provide the necessary legislative framework to ensure growth and prosperity, Congressman Engel gave remarks to the Assembly of Kosovo at a special session convened in his honor. Noting his involvement over the years in support of the fight for freedom and independence, Engel delivered an emotional message of friendship and support from the United States. He focused on the need to maintain a safe and secure environment for all Kosovo's citizens, especially its minority communities, and said that the institutions of Kosovo needed to take over the reins of governance and apply themselves to stamping out corruption, strengthening the rule of law, and improving the economy so all could prosper and live peacefully in Kosovo. (Note: entire text can be found at www.pristina.usembassy.gov)

Comment

¶7. (SBU) CODEL Engel's visit was timely and constructive, and brought a message of friendship and support for Kosovo during the continuing, difficult transition from UN protectorate to supervised independence. It also reinforced our own constant messages of patience and restraint on the part of Kosovar authorities in dealing with the north and other Serb-majority areas, and the need to cooperate across party lines. We welcomed, in particular, the CODEL's meeting with members of the Kosovo Serb caucus in the Assembly, which demonstrated clearly the USG vision of a multi-ethnic Kosovo where there is room for all to participate in its institutions. End Comment.

¶8. (U) CODEL Engel did not have the opportunity to clear this message.
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